



CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MINDANAO

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES PROJECT

BACKGROUND

Discussions about conflict in Mindanao invariably center on the decades old separatist conflict led by the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. At the community level, however, clan conflicts (referred to as “rido” in many parts of Mindanao) and conflicts over resources abound and are sometimes mistaken as the work of separatist groups or terrorists.

In fact, the problem of violence as a result of clashes between feuding clans or tribes is a common occurrence in these regions. A Social Weather Stations survey on conflict in Mindanao in 2002 revealed that 43% of respondents cited violence in their areas due to family, clan or tribal disputes as opposed to only 25% citing clashes between the military and the MILF/MNLF.

Conflicts over community resources not only divide residents of communities themselves, they can often lead to conflict between the community and the government. While the former can hamper productivity, investments and economic growth, the latter can in extreme cases lead to armed insurgency. There are studies that show that the New People’s Army is successful in recruiting youths from indigenous communities which are faced with change and displacement caused by government or private investments in such resource-intensive industries as forestry, mining or energy production and distribution.

TAF is implementing the Conflict Management in the Philippines Project with funding from USAID to better understand the dynamics of clan conflict and conflicts over resources, prevent more conflicts of this nature from happening, and help resolve existing cases.

GOAL

To transform conflicts in Mindanao, particularly clan or communal conflict and conflict over resources, into manageable disputes through better knowledge of the dynamics of the specific conflict and enhanced conflict resolution mechanisms.

OBJECTIVES

The Conflict Management in the Philippines Project is being implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF) with funding from USAID, and has the following objectives:

- To address clan conflict by undertaking participatory research into the dynamics of the problem;
- To design and support strategic interventions that would enable community members to effectively prevent clan conflicts and the government to respond to it;
- To strengthen and build capacity in resource management departments of the national government and support negotiation coaching for communities in order to address community conflicts over resources.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project has the following project activities:

Understanding the dynamics of “rido” or clan conflict -- this primarily consists of in-depth diagnostic studies meant to gain a better understanding about when rido occurs; what triggers it; how are young people socialized about it; how people understand it; and what are the variations of rido among different ethnic groups. The diagnostic studies also aim to identify strategic interventions that can prevent or mitigate rido.

Understanding and preventing conflicts over natural resources -- this component includes the institutionalization of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) in the Department of Environment and natural Resources and the Department of Agrarian Reform, mediation training and negotiation coaching.



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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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ACHIEVEMENTS

Project accomplishments include the following:

- Ten (10) in-depth studies covering 11 conflict affected provinces of Mindanao have been completed. These studies provided the most up-to-date and most comprehensive understanding of the rido phenomenon.
- The studies established among others that:

Rido is more rampant than previously thought. For example, from 1970 to 2004, 214 cases of rido were recorded in Maguindanao alone.

Rido is multi-dimensional. This means that conflicts may not be limited to two groups or clans but could involve several clans forming temporary alliances and the actors involved in rido often hold multiple positions. Some of those involved are clan members in control of various fields of power, such as traditional leadership structures, local governments, military or police, paramilitary forces or insurgents. Such overlapping roles, particularly where members of opposing clans are members of the military and separatist groups, have often caused rido to escalate from clan disputes to clashes between the Government of the Philippines and separatist groups like the MILF.

The causes of rido range from land boundary disputes, petty fights, theft, elopement or the non-payment of debts to more serious offenses like murder and rape. Many of these offenses when perceived to be affronts to a family's lineage or dignity (known among Maranaos as "maratabat") trigger rido.

- Two conferences presenting the major findings of the rido studies were held in Davao City and Manila to an interested audience of more than 200 people representing academe, government, media and civil society. These conferences raised public awareness about rido as an important factor in the management of violent conflict in Mindanao and generated commitment from stakeholders to pursue concrete actions to address it.
- Seven grants were awarded to a variety of institutions, which organized activities ranging from public forums, conflict assessments, conflict management training events, to dialogues that address disputes over natural resources.